

Esalen

Esalen is a state of consciousness as much as it is a physical place. It is a pagan monastery, a school of the mysteries, where seekers of every description come to find light. Breaking out of the crumbling structures of their past, they come to find themselves. At this poignant moment in their lives, Esalen stands like the Temple at Delphi, where paths inward are offered, where they come to discover again their souls, their bodies, their pain, their knowledge, their happiness at being alive. For many, Esalen is where the tide turns in their private revolution against the inner tyrants of the past.

But Esalen can be Hell as much as Paradise. The air is rarefied, the energy from the mountains, the canyon, the ocean, is powerful and prone to dramatic shifts. It is a climate for those who are both vigorous and capable of total defeat. For here your nightmares must come true to fulfill your dreams. Here you are forced to fall flat on your face before you can drink the cool, sweet waters of joy. Many do not enjoy too long a stay, for here the mirror is ruthlessly turned round to face inward: the demons, flushed to the surface, are no longer "out there." The pace of karma quickens and comes home.

The ocean at its feet, extending immensely into the distance, lets us breathe, expands our inspiration, absorbs our poisons, promises the infinite. The mountains and cliffs converge to form a tightrope for our existence: it is a land of the warrior. The mysterious energies of the creek and waterfall flow from a redwood canyon enchanting beyond words. And at the heart of this temple of Nature, the springs pour forth warmth from the womb of the Earth. In this sanctuary, our bodies are nourished, made supple and young, healed after the armorings of the cities. The baths are literally a fountain of youth.

Esalen is a Renaissance Court, with its geniuses and fools, its royalty and peasants, its knights and ladies, its musicians and scholars, its astrologers and ministers, its rogues and lovers. Here, at this Westernmost frontier of the continent—and therefore both outlaw country and yet closest to the East—lies a center of learning, of culture, a brave experiment at history's edge. A threshold for change, it is both an incarnation of the ancient and a gateway for the yet unsung.

Esalen is where the archetypal dimension of reality seems to breathe itself visibly into our world. Somehow the magnificence of its beauty draws out the deep powers of the human spirit. Esalen is a Kingdom of Death and Rebirth. It is a place inside each of us.

Richard Tarnas
Fall 1978